

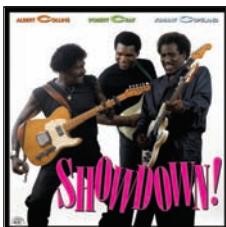
# BIG CITY Rhythm & BLUES

# REVIEWS

## ALBERT COLLINS, JOHNNY COPELAND AND ROBERT CRAY "Showdown!"

Alligator Records

The year was 1984 and took place at the Chicago Blues Festival. It was the Texas Guitar Summit set and Albert Collins and Johnny Copeland were on stage with one of their idols, Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown. As one could imagine there



were plenty of six string fireworks going on at that particular event. Alligator Records president Bruce Iglauer and co-producer Dick Shurman saw and heard the magic, wanting to take these three in the studio to capture that energy. However, Brown felt uncomfortable sharing space on a record in this manner. Collins recommended a new, at that time, gun slinger named Robert Cray. Cray, of course, jumped at the chance to be involved in such a momentous project and the rest, as they say, is history.

Alligator Records has taken one of the most successful and impactful releases in their catalog and given it a fresh and respectful redux for its 40 year anniversary. The reissue is beautifully re-mastered, with gatefold packaging and a clear pressed vinyl version as well. Also, the expanded liner notes

and new photos make for a fun and engaging listening experience.

This is a straight up and no-nonsense blues record that blends three of the finest guitar craftsmen in a wonderful and electrifying head cutting session. But for all the competitive bluster, elder statesmen Collins and Copeland take the younger Cray under their wing and you, the listener, are all the better for it. While all three guitarists are the "stars," if you will, the collective rhythm section of Casey Jones (drums), Johnny B. Gayden (bass) and Allen Batts (organ) keep everything cracking and on point.

So, let's have some fun and do the run down on this marvelous album. They kick it off with the sizzling and jazzy swing number "T-Bone Shuffle." Right from the outset you're drawn in by the trio's iron clad simpatico. They each take turns doing a vocal line or two, paired with some signature and incendiary guitar banter. And with Collins' band doing their thing, it's a smooth hand-in-glove performance. "The Moon is Full" follows and features the stinging guitar leads and vocals of Collins. The "Ice Man" himself was always a great storyteller as well as entertainer, and this song is a great example of his unique stylized approach. Copeland's "Lion's Den" is a souped-up, octane-enriched rave up that will assuredly get your feet stomping and get you out on the dance floor. His rich and robust vocals drive his infatuation with the woman in the song

home like no other. The guitar handoffs are seamless and mimic each other in a way that keeps the tune rising beyond the boiling point. Cray really digs in with some fine axe work and lead vocals on "She's Into Something." It's a buoyant and jubilant performance that alternates between a funky syncopated shuffle and a spirited swing. He was just coming into his own at this time, both as an artist and as a recognized musician, to a pop audience. Tunes like this helped cement his place in the pantheons of blues stardom. Moving on, Copeland's "Bring Your Fine Self Home" features Collins on solo guitar and harmonica, with the songwriter's mighty pipes pleading to his girl to come back and work things out with him. Collins skillfully wraps his harp work around the lead vocal and ups the ante, with enough ice breaking riffage to melt an Arctic Polar Cap. "Black Cat Bone" begins with an impromptu conversation between Collins and Copeland reminiscing about the composer of this tune, Hop Wilson. And then Copeland erupts into a hellacious vocal that sets the track aflame. It's brimming with unbridled passion and crazy energy that really works. Kudos extended to organist Batts who subtly keeps the groove percolating with his tight and well-crafted accompaniment. They slow things down to almost a whisper for a track called "The Dream." Cray has always had such a honey-smooth tone to his voice and he works it

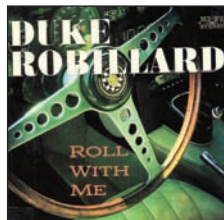
to full advantage here. Batts lays down some tasty keys as the atmospheric and surreal mood of the piece takes you over. After that it is time to pick up the pace on "Albert's Alley." The band comes in hot, with some mad walking lines from bassist Gayden. This track cooks, with Copeland's solo sandwiched between Collins' 'smokin' melodic and chicken pickin' brilliance. Ray Charles' "Blackjack" gets a scorched earth-styled take as all three virtuosos dig deep into their trick bag of Telecaster and Stratocaster delights. Collins spins the tale of being the luckiest unlucky card player in the casino, as only he can. And the steady bubbling rhythms of the band underneath lay the groundwork for a momentous string-bending photo finish. They conclude the album with a bonus track by Guitar Slim called "Something To Remember You By." It's a heartfelt nostalgic kind of piece, with a nice sentiment to his woman as Collins leads the charge on guitar and vocals. Copeland takes the second solo and rides the track out on top of a relaxed and low intensity groove by one of the best rhythm sections on record.

It's a great opportunity to experience this recording once again in all its refurbished glory. Don't walk, run to your local record dealer and, yes, buy the quality pressed clear vinyl package. It'll be worth every penny of your investment. —Eric Harabadian

## DUKE ROBILLARD Roll with Me

Stony Plain 2024

Winner of four Blues Music Awards as Guitarist of the Year, the Duke of the blues is always busy. Whether he is releasing his own electric blues, acoustic blues, or jazz albums, touring with his band, or providing session work with luminaries such as Bob Dylan, it seems that Robillard may barely have had time to sleep since co-founding the



noted band Roomful of Blues in 1967.

Consequently, many high-quality tracks that he has recorded were shelved as other projects intervened. Now Robillard has rescued a dozen of those tunes, and we are fortunate finally to savor them. Drummer Mark Teixeira, pianist Matt McCabe, and bassist Marty Ballou appear on most of the tracks, as do a slew of other renowned players, most either current or former members of Roomful and most comprising the horn section that Duke has always loved and presented.

The result is more of what has earned Robillard his fame, what I term elegant blues. It's not gut-bucket Delta blues, or street-smart Chicago blues; it's a large offering of jump blues, with some boogie and soul blues in

the mix. Why "elegant"? Because the production is pristine, the ensemble playing is ideal, and the master's guitar offerings are classy and creative without being showy or excessive.

The vibe is established from the get-go, with "Blue Coat Man" by Eddie Boyd, who was more readily known for penning the classic "Five Long Years." We're into jump blues nirvana, with successive juicy solos by saxophone, piano, and Duke's guitar. Robillard also acquires himself well as a vocalist; although limited in range and not a natural crooner, he hits the notes precisely and with some added gritty raspy forays for emphasis. He handles vocals on most tracks but does cede vocal chores on "Look What You Done" and "You Got Money" to adept singer Chris Cote.

Two of my favorite tracks are covers of Big Joe Turner tunes. The first, "I Know You Love Me," has a 1950s-1960s pop aura, and then there is "Boogie Woogie Country Girl," one of Turner's most famous numbers, also treated well on a past Roomful of Blues album. This version doesn't even have a guitar solo, but it's not missed, as the horns and McCabe's piano seemingly plead for an available dance floor.

This set ends with a number featuring a terse but tasty mid-track guitar solo demonstrating how Duke chooses the right chords and notes, and not too many of them, to fit a tune optimally. The cut is entitled "Don't You Want to Roll with Me?" Yes, I do,





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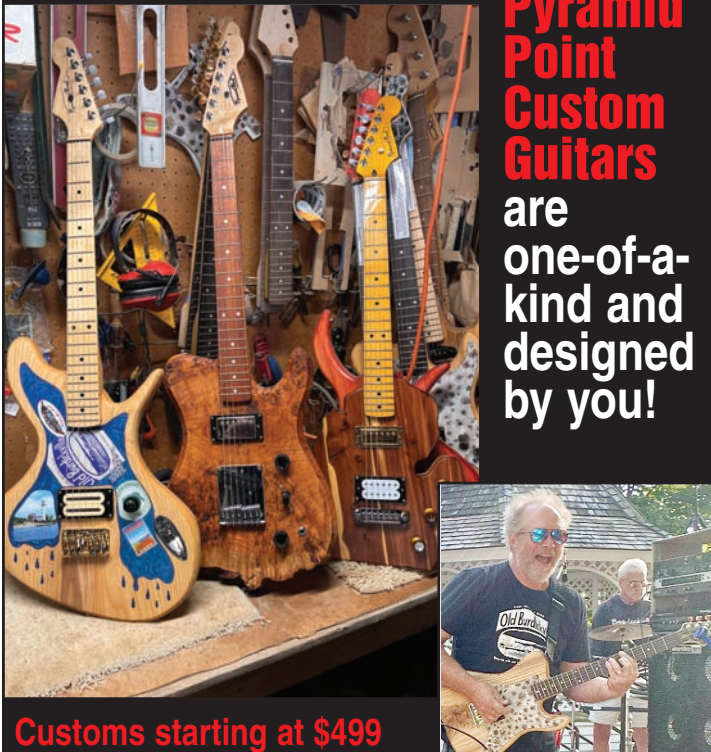
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and you will, too.—**Steve Daniels**

**LIZ PENNOCK & DR. BLUES**  
*"Christmas Eve Present"*

Upright Records

www.LizPennock.com  
 Liz Pennock and Paul "Dr. Blues" Shambarger are a Florida-based blues duo, with a number of fine album releases to choose from. It appears this is their first Christmas release, and they truly



capture the joy and spirit of the season. Pennock primarily plays upright acoustic piano and sings, but also shows up admirably here on trombone, harmonica and hand percussion. Shambarger is downright tasty on electric and Resonator guitars, drums and does some fine lead vocals as well.

This is a satisfying mix of traditional Christmas songs blended with their original fare that dovetails perfectly with the classics. Pennock simply wails on all 88 keys in the style of Boogie Woogie Red, Professor Longhair, Meade Lux Lewis and Eubie Blake. She's the real deal and puts her heart and soul into every melodic run and rhythmic phrase. Songs like "Jingle Bells" and "Merry Christmas Baby" go from swinging and upbeat to slow and soulful. Shambarger does lead vocals on his clever and cute "Santa's Looking Younger Than Me" and Pennock scores really big, with her tender and resonant vocal reading of "I'll Be Home for Christmas." "Joy to the World" is a rocking upbeat guitar and piano duel and "Bring Me

a Piana, Santa" is a Pennock-penned tune all about her Christmas wish list. Other highlights that are sure to delight include the title track, Pennock's lovely and beautifully arranged "Carol Medley," "Boogie Woogie Santa Claus" and the full orchestration of "Auld Lang Syne."

As they mention in the album's liner notes, illegal downloading and file sharing steal artists' work, income and streaming services pay very little, if at all. So, please support live musicians whenever you can and purchase their CDs, records and physical product. And, with that being said, this album makes for a fantastic stocking stuffer. So please do not hesitate to buy one today. Make this a new addition to your cherished Holiday traditions. Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays and Peace on Earth!—**Eric Harabadian**

**MITCH WOODS**  
*Happy Hour"*

MoJojo Records 2024

No surprises here, but none needed. Track eight of this set of thirteen tunes declares it straight out: "Mr. Boogie's Back in Town." When Mitch Woods is the subject, you know that you are in for a good time, with a definitive debunking of the myth that blues music is a downer.

A New York native based for decades in the San Francisco Bay Area, Woods here rearranges thirteen of his previously released numbers and presents them in crisp fashion with his Rocket 88s bandmates: drummer Larry Vann, bass guitarist Kedar Roy, and saxophonist Dave Somers. Rounding out the crew is Greaseland Studio's engineering master Kid Andersen, who lends his expert guitar talent as well. The set was recorded dur-

ing the height of the Covid-19 pandemic and gave a lift and a performing forum at the time to the unhappily closeted musicians. They overcame their forced confinement with a rollicking and raunchy set, and now we get to enjoy it.

The overall vibe is boogie! with some vibrant New Orleans strains in the mix. Woods composed all of the songs, and many of them exhibit his wryly humorous lyrics, often extolling both the erotic and the culinary talents of the distaff sex. Fitting that description are "Long, Lean, and Lanky," "Hattie Green," "Queen Bee," and



"Amber Lee." I especially like the latter, about a waitress in a diner "who sure knows how to strut her stuff"; "she got rhythm, ain't no doubt/hot chocolate shakes really knock me out/biscuits and gravy are number one/and her fried chicken is always well done...big brown eyes and ruby red lips/ a tray full of burgers and a pocket full of tips/I'd like to take her home with me, that's my Amber Lee." The track showcases Mitch and the band's ample strengths: lilting Louisiana vibe, fine tinkly piano followed by a delicious Andersen guitar solo, jazzy sax fills....Where is that diner??

As expected, there are plenty of upbeat, danceable boogies, like "Jukebox Drive," "Boogie Woogie Bar-B-Que," and "Shakin' the Shack." There are also some slower tunes which provide variety and reveal Woods's range of talent. "Jump for Joy," counter-intuitively, is a slower number fit for late night contemplation at a piano bar,

and "Cryin' for My Baby" displays Mitch's ability to croon, with his delicate piano riffs meshing very nicely with Somers's sax.

So far I have listened to this album four times, and each time was indeed a happy hour!—**Steve Daniels**

**JAKE SHIMABUKURO WITH MICK FLEETWOOD**  
*Blues Experience*

Below Records 2024

That world-renowned Hawaiian ukulele master Jake Shimabukuro has teamed with drummer Mick Fleetwood may surprise some, but it shouldn't. During Jake's over two-decade illustrious career he has collaborated with such diverse musicians as Jimmy Buffett, Willie Nelson, Ziggy Marley, Bela Fleck, and Yo-Yo Ma. Fleetwood Mac, the fabulously successful 1980s pop band co-founded in 1967 by Mick Fleetwood with guitarist Peter Green and soon after bassist John McVie,



was initially a very good British blues band. So, with Jake's regular bandmates, bassist Jackson Waldhoff and keyboard artist Michael Grande, let's have a blues album....

...or not. The real surprise, despite the album's title, is that this is far from being a blues release. Nine instrumentals comprise the set, which contains only two inarguably blues tracks. The first, "Kula Blues," is a Shimabukuro original which he refers to accurately as a shuffle, and it displays Fleetwood in fine form in tandem with Waldhoff. The other is a

cover of the late Irish guitarist Gary Moore's "Still Got the Blues," now a classic of the genre. Jake's version adheres closely to the 1990 Moore rendition, with some delightful organ added toward the end by Grande.

Then there is a cover of the Muddy Waters classic "Rollin' N Tumblin'." This will be unadulterated blues, right? Nope. This version is unlike almost any of the other innumerable takes on the song by many artists, lacking any rocking raunch. Instead, we get psychedelic ukulele.

The remaining six tracks of "Blues Experience" include covers of Procol Harum's "Whiter Shade of Pale," Neil Young's "Rockin' in the Free World," and Fleetwood Mac's "Songbird." The over-arching mood is contemplative and jazzy, appropriate for sitting on a lanai in Maui and listening while sipping wine as the sun sets. For me, the tracks lack the soul and depth of feeling inherent in blues. The musicianship, though, is excellent. Jake is indeed a master of his instrument, capable of pure single tones and dazzling runs of notes. On this set his ukulele sounds just like an electric guitar; had I not known who was playing, I would never have suspected the ukulele as the instrument I was hearing.

In sum, it's easy to enjoy this mislabeled but fruitful alliance of Jake and Mick.—**Steve Daniels**

**RICHIMAN AND GROOVE NICE**  
*Pack My Suitcase*

Naturally Music

Do you like soul blues? Do you like Seoul blues?

Yes, this is a blues band from Seoul, South Korea, and that is not an oxymoron. The trio was formed as the Richiman Trio in 2018 by singer, songwriter, and guitarist Isaac Cha, who adopted the moniker Richiman. He

and drummer I.O. Lee welcomed bassist Jinhee Baek to the triad in 2022. The three musicians, although only in their twenties, are widely admired musicians South Korea. They have toured the U.S. several times, including an appearance in 2019 at the International Blues Challenge. On their subsequent IBC foray in 2022, they were one of only five finalist bands.

"Pack My Suitcase" proves that the band has become familiar with the blues idiom and is well on their way to mastering it. Of the twelve tracks, the first six were recorded in Los Angeles; three more were recorded in Memphis, and one each found its origin in Las Vegas and in Seoul. Production values are wor-



thy on all of the sessions, with instruments and vocals well mixed.

The first three cuts are pretty straightforward rock, with "Groove Nice" and "Dance with a Boogie" particularly distinguished by the funky, syncopated symbiosis of bass and drums. "I'm Flying to You" ratchets down the tempo, with a deep blues groove a la Muddy Waters, and it's followed by "137," another slow blues featuring effective vocal harmonies and exquisitely lyrical guitar work by Cha. "I'm Right Behind You," a mid-tempo shuffle, is again graced by fine guitar licks, although limited by a somewhat strained lead vocal.

"Richiman Blues" finds Cha again excelling on guitar, while ranging vocally from rasp to falsetto. The one-minute filler, "In the Royal," is succeeded by "Look Back at Yourself," with noteworthy harmonica

by guest Felix Slim. (Another Slim; they're everywhere.) "My Life Is Mine" is another slow number with Cha singing passionately over the delightful piano support of renowned keyboard artist Bruce Katz. After the syn-copated "Yeah," the set concludes with "On the Blues," which is somewhat unfocused but ends with several bars of intriguing and skilled psychedelic noodling.

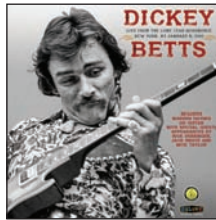
As this review goes to press, Richiman and Groove Nice are again touring the U.S. When they get to Santa Barbara, I will be there to see them!—**Steve Daniels**

### **DICKEY BETTS** *Live From the Lone Star Roadhouse NYC*

Rock Beat

The Dickey Betts Band did a show for the ages at the Lone Star Roadhouse on November 1, 1988. Thankfully, it was recorded and broadcast on WNEW radio and the entire show is presented here in this 2-disc CD set. The concert mixes 8 songs from the group's recent *Pattern Disruptive* album with Allman Brothers Band classics like "Jessica" and "Blue Sky." The band includes guitarist Warren Haynes and keyboardist Johnny Neel, who both joined Betts in the next iteration of the Allman Brothers a couple of years later. Bassist Marty Privette and drummer Matt Abts round out this potent group. Abts, of course, has been Haynes' partner in crime in the long running Gov't Mule. What makes this project truly unique is the appearances of the late, great Cream bassist Jack Bruce (who sings the Cream take on Howlin' Wolf's "Spoonful"), ex-Rolling Stones guitarist Mick Taylor and Rick Derringer, who performs his hit "Rock and Roll Hoochie Koo". A highlight

is the recently recorded "Duane's Tune," which is on a par with other Betts-penned instrumental gems like "In Memory of



Elizabeth Reed" and "Jessica." Hard-hitting blues rockers from the *Pattern Disruptive* album like "Rock Bottom" and "The Blues Ain't Nothin'" fit in well with Allman Brothers' staples like "Statesboro Blues," which features Warren Haynes covering Gregg Allman's iconic vocal. *Live From the Lone Star Roadhouse NYC* would be a welcome addition to the collection of any Allman Brothers fan, whether casual or serious.—**Bob Monteleone**

### **JONTAVIOUS WILLIS** *West Georgia Blues* Strolling Bones Records

Singer-songwriter/guitarist Jontavious Willis is proud of his familial roots and the regional roots of the blues. In the spirit of Rev. Gary Davis, Lightnin' Hopkins, Charley Patton and Skip James emerges a young man who pays homage to the acoustic blues tradition. He's been nominated for a Grammy and has received praise from, and toured with, luminaries such as Taj Mahal and Keb' Mo'.

This is a solid body of work that is flawlessly conceived, written and performed by Willis. He is a triple threat, in that regard, who knows the Piedmont, Delta and Gospel guitar styles implicitly. And the pervasive sonic landscape of the album sounds like something from a bygone era, while still balancing that construct with a modern lyrical and melodic aesthetic.

The 28-year-old blues wunderkind is joined by his musical compadres Ethan Leinwand on piano and organ, Jayy Hopp on drums, acoustic guitar and vocals, Rodrigo Mantovani on acoustic bass, with guest players Jon Atkinson on acoustic guitar and Lloyd Buchanan on vocals.

This is a full-length album comprised of original material that has a poetic balance of sweetness, civility and a reflective thoughtful tone. Of the 15 stellar tracks here, the title song rings true in Willis' account of his family history and how it all ties in to the origins of the blues in West Georgia. It's



an acapella piece that appropriately sets the tone for the album. The follow up, "Charlie Brown Blues," features some great solo finger-style guitar reminiscent of the sound and soul of the Southern region. "Keep Your Worries on the Dance Floor" is a full band piece that grooves in an almost understated manner, but it should really connect with the listener on a visceral and uplifting level. Other tracks like "Rough Time Blues" and "Lula Mae" run the gamut from somber and pensive to noisy and rocking. "Ghost Woman" is a solo guitar piece and features one of Willis' most haunting and ethereal vocals. And "Who's Gonna Hear It?" followed by "A Life Is All I Need" mines the dichotomy of vintage Taj Mahal segueing into light combo jazz.

"West Georgia Blues" is a musical trip through the hills, valleys, mountains, forests and urban centers of the state. The album reflects a state of mind, with stories about the peo-

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ple, places and events—past and present—that have helped form the character and shape the career narrative of this creative young artist. As he states in the liner notes, “I am so proud of this record. These are the Georgia blues and they’re a breath of old air, but they’re straight from my heart.”—**Eric Harabadian**

### BLUE MOON MARQUEE New Orleans Sessions

Self-produced

This is the fifth album by Jasmine Colette and A.W. Cardinal, who are Blue Moon Marquee. The British Columbia, Canada duo has been performing to appreciative audiences for over a decade. Their 2022 album, “Scream, Holler & Howl” won the prestigious Canadian JUNO award for Blues Album of the Year, and in 2023 they followed up with four! Maple Blues awards: Album, Songwriter,



Entertainer, and Acoustic Act of the Year.

Both principals sing, Colette plies bass guitar, and Cardinal handles the six string. Joining them are drummers Brett Gallo and Nicholas Solnick, pianist B.C. Coogan, and saxophonist Danny Abrams. Jon Atkinson chimes in on harmonica on two numbers as well as engineering the ten tunes, four originals and six well-chosen covers.

Why the album’s title? The set was recorded at Atkinson’s Bigtone Records in NoLa, and its backing musicians reside there. Of course, there is some of the city’s blues

vibe, but interestingly, the first four tracks fit the genre known as “hokum” blues: blues typical of the 1920s and 1930s, characterized by humorous lyrics and often sexual double entendres. Thus, the album opens with “Black Rat Swing” by Memphis Minnie, followed by tunes by Lead Belly, Bo Carter, and Charley (misidentified as Charlie) Patton. All four numbers are jaunty, with a solid rhythm section, very nice piano by Coogan, and some admirable guitar work. Cardinal, with a gritty rasp, and Colette, with a smooth soprano, mesh well vocally, the latter sounding like early Maria Muldaur.

Cardinal steps forward as main vocalist for the remainder of the set. The next three tracks are originals, led off by “Trickster Coyote,” a brief cut showcasing Atkinson on “Mississippi sax.” Shortly after we get an intriguing version of the classic “St. James Infirmary,” highlighting Cardinal’s vocal and the symbiosis of piano and saxophone. “Some Ol’ Day,” the last original of the album, features more of Abrams’s baritone sax, and the set closes with Atkinson contributing harp again on a cover of Lonnie Johnson’s “Got the Blues So Bad.”

Despite skilled musicians, “New Orleans Sessions” eschews extended instrumental solos. It presents a collection of appealing tunes confirming BMM’s status as one of Canada’s best blues acts.—**Steve Daniels**

### OTILIA DONAIRE Bluesin’ It Up

Self-produced 2024

Here’s another chanteuse on the loose in the San Francisco Bay Area, and she is worthy of your attention. Donaire wrote nine of the dozen songs on this release, on

which she is ably abetted by drummer Robi Bean, keyboardists Greg Rahn and Pamela Arthur, guitarist Joe Lococo, and her musical director and bass guitarist Chris Matheos. Six other musicians participate, including a vigorous horn section. The result is a set of pithy tracks, only one over four minutes,



with a lot of zip and zest.

The only instrument that Donaire plays is her voice, but she does it well. Her vocals are sassy, sexy, and sprightly, and well suited to the tunes. She opens with an attractive original cut, “Wrong Side of 45,” which echoes everyone’s lament at the inexorable creep of time. Its fervent pace is juiced by the horns led by trumpeter John Halbleib. It’s succeeded by four lively shuffles, at which Donaire excels, and then “Meet Me in My Dreams,” at a more moderate tempo and with more snazzy guitar work.

“On My Way to San Francisco” is a brief two minute exercise, but an infectious outing, with fine piano by Rahn, reminiscent of the pop classic “Going to Kansas City.” Wah-wah guitar and organ introduce Otilia’s cover of Koko Taylor’s “Voodoo Woman”; Donaire can’t match Taylor’s powerful rasp (nobody could), but she complements her own gritty sound with smoldering sultriness. Then Otilia croons convincingly on “Over You” and rocks out on JD Miller’s “Sugar Coated Love.” The syncopated, Latin-inflected “Tired of Loving You” then leads to the closing number, Willie Dixon’s “Hoochie Coochie Man” morphed appropriately into

“Hoochie Coochie Woman.” A zinging guitar solo and Otilia’s impassioned singing nail it, and provide a fitting capstone to this introduction to a quality vocalist and songwriter.—**Steve Daniels**

## Film

### JAMES “SUPER CHIKAN” JOHNSON: A LIFE IN BLUES

By Mark Rankin and Brian Wilson

Ten To A Room Productions

The documentary, “A Life in Blues,” tells an authentic story authentically! Conceived, directed and produced by Canadians Mark Rankin and Brian Wilson, the biopic features blues musician James “Super Chikan” Johnson in his element, the Mississippi Delta blues scene. The film is aptly named, as it opens a window into all that colors the life in blues of James “Super Chikan” Johnson. The cinematography is lush and engaging, almost a second star of the film. “A Life in Blues” is a full-length feature film that has been well received at film festivals in Canada, Europe and the US. It portrays the reality of the social structure, past and present, in which blues music and blues musicians survive and thrive.

James “Super Chikan” Johnson is a truck driver and heavy equipment operator by day, a blues entertainer by night, and in between, an inventor and visual artist. The guitars he creates out of found objects and decorates with artistic imagination are valued by blues lovers the world over. The documentary displays the full range of Johnson’s talents against the rich background that this man inhabits.



Rankin and Wilson skillfully interspersed shots of Chikan (as he is known) speaking and performing with comments by family, friends and fellow performers, to tell a story that illustrates the richness of the Mississippi Delta, its people and its music. Super Chikan is open to the world around him, and incorporates its full flavor into his songwriting, music and entertainment style. As expressed by a music educator in the film, blues music helps its devotees navigate the world in which they live.

Super Chikan’s music is threaded throughout the documentary which introduces us to the world of a bluesman in the Mississippi Delta in the 21st Century. Included are scenes from blues clubs like Ground Zero and Red’s Lounge in Clarksdale, Blue Monday at Hal & Mal’s in Jackson and various venues in Vancouver, Canada. Among those helping to tell the story of Super Chikan and the Mississippi Delta are well known blues musicians Charlie Musselwhite, Robert Kimbrough, Sr., Cedric Burnside, Christine ‘Kingfish’ Ingram, Grammy winner Bobby Rush and of course the women from Chikan’s band, The Fighting Cocks.

One of the filmmakers, Mark Rankin, is a blues musician himself, and this shows in the range of music and performers showcased in this film, and the sensitivity to the “little things” that influence the life of a bluesman. This

is a film for blues lovers, yes...but also for anyone who likes to “see” into the real world of everyday folks in a unique and compelling environment.

“James ‘Super Chikan’ Johnson - A Life in Blues” will be available on streaming services in Spring of 2025. Follow [www.alifeinbluesmovie.com](http://www.alifeinbluesmovie.com) for updates and information on select screenings. —**Savina Schoenhofer and Peggy Brown**

## Book

### THE ULTIMATE BOOK OF BLUES GUITAR LEGENDS

By Pete Prown

This big, beautiful book is subtitled “The Players and Guitars That Shaped the Music.” Filled with photos and printed on heavy stock, The Ultimate Book of Blues Guitar Legends is an encyclopedia for both blues fans and guitarists.

The easiest way to see if your favorite blues guitarist is represented here is by consulting the index at the end of the book, organized alphabetically by artists’ last names. That’s because the book itself does not discuss musicians by rank, alphabetically, chronologically, or strictly by region, but relies on categories and entries that could be questioned by blues enthusiasts, as could be the definition of “Legend” and who is included here as a legend.

Chapter 1, Unplugged: Acoustic Blues, features true legends Son House and Robert Johnson, as well as introducing us to “key players” in a sidebar technique that is followed throughout the book. (Key players here include Charley Patton and Lead Belly, who get a paragraph each, as do all the key



players in the book.) But this chapter also includes a section on Piedmont Blues. The 16th and final chapter, Young Guns, discusses Kingfish Ingram, but also includes "Women of the Blues Part 2." In



between are chapters on Chicago Blues, British Blues (2 chapters featuring Keith Richards!), Country Blues, "Bell-Bottom Blues" (discussing Duane Allman, Dickey Betts, Eric Clapton, Johnny Winter, and Roy Buchanan, but also including blurbs about Alligator Records, the birth of roots Rock, and Women of the Blues Part 1), "FM: The Devil's Radio" (Billy Gibbons, Santana, Rory

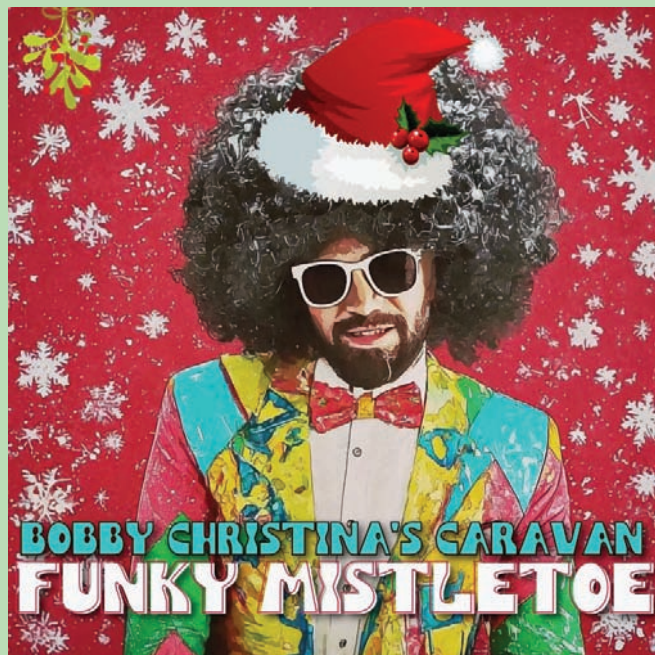
Gallagher, Lowell George & Paul Barrere, and Robin Trower), and more.

Before the chapters begin, there's a general introduction and a one-page summary of terms: 12-bar Blues, 8-bar Blues, the turnaround, bottleneck or slide, vibrato, fingerstyle, bending, and blue notes—in that order. At the beginning of each chapter, author Prown provides an overview of the themes and historical significance of the information to come. The book is filled with quotes, but there are no footnotes. Instead, there's an extensive References list at the end of the book, in alphabetical order by last names of artists, and including bibles like Palmer's *Deep Blues* and *The Land Where the Blues Began* by Alan Lomax. Prown's sources are eclectic, ranging from newspaper articles and interviews in music magazines to documentaries and books. He

thanks Jas Obrecht (award-winning music journalist and former editor of *Guitar Player* magazine) for giving him access to Obrecht's interview archives. Prown ends the book with a quote defining the blues, told to him by Selwyn Birchwood.

Prown's credentials are not mentioned in the book; knowing his background gives some insight into the choices in this book, especially the emphasis on white players. Prown is former editor of *Guitar Shop* and *Vintage Guitar*. His previous books include *Legends of Rock Guitar*, *Gear Secrets of the Guitar Legends*, and *US Heavy Metal Guitars*. *The Ultimate Book of Blues Guitar Legends* is an impressive effort that could have been even more useful with better organization and more transparency regarding sources. —Karen McFarland

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